

CHRB NEWS & REVIEW

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EVERYTHING'S A-OK WITH Y2K

There now, that didn't hurt a bit, did it?

Autotote installed its Y2K programming correction into the totalizator system during the recent meet at Hollywood Park with not so much as a techno-hiccup to alert fans that any change had taken place.

It's the same software patch that Autotote has been installing in other locations throughout North America ever since its 1998 review identified seven component systems that the totalizator company considered susceptible to Y2K complications.

Now Autotote is moving forward during the Del Mar meet with even more compre-

hensive testing of the modified code by simulating a calendar rollover to January 1, 2000. Company officials don't anticipate any problem as they verify all aspects of the wagering system, including Autotote's compatibility with other totalizator company systems that are part of the simulcast network.

"We have tested those parts of the system that Autotote has 100% control of, and they work on January 1 and other Y2K dates," Autotote Information Director John DeGeorge told CHRB Executive Director

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Former groom Oscar Gonzales is now part of the State of California's Y2K readiness program. For details, see page 4.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Back in 1993 when I interviewed for the position of executive director of the CHRB, I made the comment that the industry needs to spend money for research to find out some of the unknowns about certain medications.

Six years later, I'm pleased to see the arrival of the Equine Athletic Performance Laboratory at the University of California-Davis. Housed in a new on-campus facility provided by the university, the laboratory is being developed and will soon be up and running – literally.

The horses involved in these studies are put through a rigorous daily conditioning program in order to maintain racing fitness. This is desirable because the metabolic process for horses at rest can differ markedly from those in training. By simulating a racing environment, the effects of medications administered to these horses will more accurately reflect the process at racetracks.

The program will be under the guidance of Dr. Greg Ferraro, director of the Center for Equine Health, and will utilize the expertise of several individuals and departments within the university, including the Analytical Chemistry Laboratory.

This multi-discipline approach hopes to give us a better understanding of some of racing's problems, such as the effects of medications and racing injuries. This will help the industry devise strategies to address the problems.

I'm especially hopeful that the laboratory will provide regulators with the hard scientific evidence that we require to make decisions concerning the integrity of racing and the health and safety of racehorses.

The performance laboratory is a great step. However, there will be no easy answers. And without the necessary funding or without the benefit of time to do the proper research, it could become just another good idea that didn't work.

We all must support the concept, fund the program, and give it time to do its work. The public, the industry, and the horses deserve no less.

Roy C. Wood, Jr.
Roy C. Wood, Jr.



IN THE GOLDEN STATE

MAKING THE ROUNDS WITH WILL MEYERS, CALIFORNIA STATE STEWARD



A regular contributor to CHRB News & Review, Will Meyers frequently focuses on the daily activities of stewards throughout the state and the overall efforts of the CHRB to regulate the horse racing industry.

Does the CHRB really care about safety issues? You bet it does.

To ensure safety for horse and rider, the CHRB has implemented rules concerning maintenance of track surfaces and rails. Safety vests have been added as required equipment, in addition to the required helmet for jockey safety.

The whip rules have been modified to require an open, looped end and other design features, while limiting weight and length. Rules also have been strengthened concerning the proper use of the whip, and the stewards have been sanctioning violators with stiff fines.

Therapeutic medications have been added to the authorized medication list to aid in the healing process of horses at acceptable levels for racing.

And by sponsoring ongoing safety research through the Postmortem Program at UC-Davis, the CHRB is working with this world-renowned program to develop information to save horses from breaking down under the stress of racing.

In other words, the CHRB is constantly looking into safety issues and making changes wherever needed to protect both equine and human participants.

As for enforcement, the stewards and associate stewards at every racetrack are required to oversee safety issues. Before any race meet in the state is approved for racing, one of us performs a track inspection, often accompanied by a member of management. This inspection includes physically walking the track, checking rail height and physical appearance, noting objects that are inside the required 10-foot clearance of the inside rail, and addressing all aspects of safety.

Rails must maintain a smooth continuity and measure consistently between 38 and 42 inches from the surface of the track to the top of the rail. A report is generated following the inspection, which contains any violations or areas of concern and recommendations for fixing the problems. Both management and the CHRB receive copies of the report.

The stewards, state veterinarians, and all racing officials monitor the equipment used by jockeys and trainers, medication compliance by trainers and vets, and any other issues concerning safety on a daily basis during the race meets.

It's not a perfect world. Jockeys and horses still sometimes sustain injuries. But the efforts of the CHRB have helped in minimizing those injuries. Further research goes on constantly, and all of us will strive for better safety measures to eliminate injury to our athletes.



CALENDAR

AUGUST

- 11 – San Mateo fair meet opens at Bay Meadows.**
- 12 – Ferndale fair meet opens.**
- 20 – CHRB monthly meeting in Del Mar.**
- 25 – Cal-Expo fair meet opens in Sacramento.**

SEPTEMBER

- 3 – Bay Meadows thoroughbred meet opens.**
- 9 – Fairplex fair meet opens in Pomona.**
- 17 – CHRB monthly meeting in Pomona.**
- 29 – Oak Tree thoroughbred meet opens.**

OCTOBER

- 6 – Fresno fair meet opens.**
- 15 – Cal-Expo harness meet opens in Sacramento.**
- 29 – CHRB monthly meeting in Arcadia.**

THE EQUINE PRESCRIPTION

FROM THE DESK OF THE CHRB
EQUINE MEDICAL DIRECTOR



DR. RON JENSEN

Members of the California racing industry are currently debating the use of toe grabs as traction devices on horseshoes.

Research completed at the University of California-Davis in conjunction with the California Postmortem Examination Program demonstrated a relationship between toe grabs and an increased risk for fatal musculoskeletal injury, specifically for fatal suspensory apparatus injury (injuries involving the fetlock joint, sesamoid bones, and suspensory ligament).

A two-year study of all thoroughbred racehorses that died at California racetracks determined that the odds of any fatal musculoskeletal injury was 3.5 times greater for horses shod with a regular-height toe grab on horseshoes of the front limbs than for horses without toe grabs. The odds of fatal suspensory apparatus failure were 6 and 16 times higher for horses shod with a low-height toe grab and regular-height toe grabs, respectively.

Interestingly, the presence of another traction device, a full rim, on horseshoes of the front limbs was associated with a two-thirds decrease in odds for any fatal musculoskeletal injury and for fatal suspensory apparatus injury. This information has been communicated to the racing industry through scientific and lay publications. It is also contained in a CHRB bulletin titled "Postmortem Findings," which is in the process of being updated.

It is important to keep in mind a complete shoeing history for these horses was not available. The length of time that these horses were shod with toe grabs prior to their death was not known. Nor was it known whether those horses were shod with flat shoes for training and toe grabs for racing. It is also important to understand that the study only focused on the type of shoes worn by the horses at the time of their death and did not look at other injury risk factors that might have been involved.

Despite these limitations, the study suggested that the use of toe grabs on horseshoes may increase the chance of injury. Simple observation supports this finding.

The suspensory apparatus of the horse is a major support structure for the leg and also acts as a shock absorber. A horse

should be trimmed and shod so that it has a correct hoof pastern axis. This means that the angle of the front of the hoof, the angle of the rear of the hoof, and the angle of the pastern should be approximately the same. A horse with a long toe and a low heel changes these angles and puts increased strain on the suspensory apparatus. The addition of a toe grab raises the toe and puts additional pressure on the suspensory apparatus, especially when the horse is traveling at racing speed.

Since the California study was completed, there have not been any other research findings published that support or contradict the results of the study. No other racing jurisdiction

has a postmortem program similar to that in place in California. Nor has there been any scientific evidence that horses training and racing without toe grabs are at any increased risk of injury. However, in conjunction with race-track management, the CHRB plans to check horses sometime during the Del Mar season to determine whether toe

grabs are being used and, if so, their length.

The same UC-Davis researchers have recently collected injury data and shoeing data on 200 horses trained by 30 different trainers. This data was collected daily for 90 days at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park. The researchers are presently analyzing this data in an attempt to identify the common types of injuries and lameness for thoroughbred racehorses in California and to determine if some types of horseshoes are associated with increased or decreased risk of injury or lameness. Hopefully, the results of this study conducted on live horses will further increase our understanding of the relationship between injuries and toe grabs.

In the meantime, owners and trainers considering whether or not to use toe grabs should weigh the results of the completed research, which suggests an increased risk of injury, with the perceived or real benefits of using toe grabs, then come to a decision based on what is best for the horse.

"Owners and trainers considering whether or not to use toe grabs should weigh the results of the completed research...then come to a decision based on what is best for the horse."

Dr. Ronald Jensen



HORSE RACING AND STATE GOVERNMENT: GONZALES SPEAKS BOTH LANGUAGES FLUENTLY

Oscar Gonzales knows horses.

A member of racing's celebrated Valenzuela family, Gonzales grew up around racetracks and worked for the likes of D. Wayne Lukas, Darrell Vienna, and other noted trainers.

Gonzales also knows state government.

He parlayed community activism into a staff position with Antonio Villaraigosa, the Speaker of the Assembly, and currently he's working on Governor Gray Davis' high-priority Y2K project.

Gonzales used politics to get out of the neighborhood, so to speak, and who knows, someday he just might own the neighborhood. At age 31, he's full of energy, confidence, and desire to make a difference.

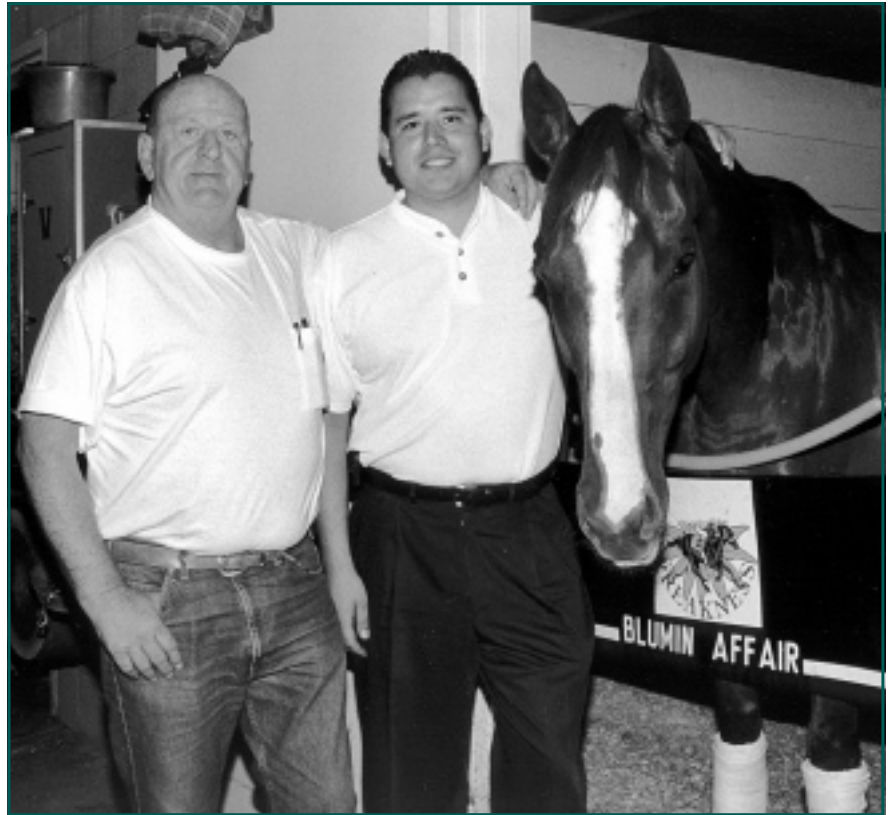
Nowadays, Gonzales is a public information officer working with all state agencies, including the California Horse Racing Board. He gathers information from the agencies, then honestly and accurately communicates the status of the State of California on Y2K issues.

As the son of super exercise rider and barn foreman Oscar Gonzales Sr., himself a nephew of the great rider Milo Valenzuela, the younger Gonzales was born to racing. His mother, Yolanda, worked in the track kitchen, assuring him "larger portions than anyone else." Every weekend, every summer, he worked at one track or another. The California racing circuit was his home away from home.

"You don't know how good it feels to get a little dirt on my shoes again back here," said Gonzales during a recent return visit to the stable area at Hollywood Park under far different circumstances than the last time he was there in 1989 working as a groom.

"This industry pumps through my veins, and no amount of therapy will ever get it out of me," he said with pride. "Horse racing taught me the value of working hard, staying committed, and not burning bridges. It allowed me to make an honest buck and to stay out of trouble. It was the perfect training ground for public service.

"Horse racing even allowed me to go to college. I lived on the backside at Santa Anita when I went to East Los Angeles College. Later, when I transferred to UC San Diego, I worked for D. Wayne Lukas and Randy Bradshaw at the Rancho Santa Fe training center. If I hadn't lived in the tack room



Oscar Gonzales (right) dropped by the barn of trainer Jack Van Berg during a recent visit to Hollywood Park. (Photo courtesy of Benoit & Associates.)

there, I couldn't have finished college. Bradshaw was flexible with my work schedule and gave me the breaks I needed to get through school."

Along the way, Gonzales proved adept at public speaking and political organizing. This was evident from his senior year in high school when he was elected student body president. Later, he was elected student body president at East Los Angeles College, and he got involved in community projects.

Gonzales' first exposure to state government occurred in his junior year in high school when he was chosen to attend Boys State, an American Legion program designed to arouse a keen interest in government and develop civic leadership.

"We spent one week in Sacramento learning about the policymaking process," explained Gonzales. "Governor Deukmejian gave an impassioned speech about getting involved. I guess I pretty much decided right then for a career in public service."

(Continued on page 11)

BE OUR GUEST...



The California Horse Racing Board believes the best way to regulate an industry is to be fully informed. The CHRB regularly solicits input from the public and the horse racing industry, and this guest editorial page is one more forum for that purpose.

This guest editorial is provided by John Russell, who conditioned the champion thoroughbreds Susan's Girl and Precisionist. Since his retirement, Russell has continued to display an intense interest in the industry in which he enjoyed a long and successful training career.

Why, with the richest purse structure in the country, does California not have a track in the top ten nationally when counting the average number of starters per race?

That question has recently been haunting track management and racing commissioners, while horsemen appear to be relatively indifferent to the problem. After all, short fields and big purses mean a better opportunity for a return on their investment.

But statistics would indicate that short fields, and particularly late scratches, compromise pari-mutuel handle and consequently purses, so it would seem obligatory for horsemen to acknowledge the fact and join with the rest of the racing industry in addressing the problem.

To understand at least part of the reason for short fields, it must be recognized that over the last decade there has been an expansion of racing throughout the country and at the same time as much as 30% fewer horses being produced by breeders.

Also, during this same period, a handful of mega stables of up to 250 horses with as many as 80 at any one racetrack, under the direction of a single trainer, have emerged. This means that very often several horses – particularly of higher class – eligible for any given race could be in the same barn, but only one of them may run.

Except in stakes races, trainers are reluctant to run against themselves, thereby leaving eligible horses for some races sitting idly in the barn or running elsewhere. A more equitable distribution of horses would reduce this situation. However, it is often not appreciated that trainers do want to run their horses; no trainer anywhere in this country makes money with a horse sitting in the barn.

Despite a substantial increase of prize money over the last couple of years in California, tracks have been complacent in marketing their racing programs while focusing their efforts upon fan development. It is notable that the last large Eastern stables to permanently relocate to Southern California were Laz Barrera (deceased), John Russell (retired), and Bobby Frankel, back in the 1970's.

To entice horsemen from other jurisdictions and increase the California horse population, a vigorous marketing effort to promote California racing should be instituted through the cooperation of the major racetracks, horsemen, and the CHRB.

To date, the Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC), at the request of the CHRB and using funds from purses authorized by state legislation, has instituted a program to bring new owners into California racing, but thereby lies a paradox of sorts. In the short term at least, it would seem contrary to their best interests to bring more competition onto California racetracks, but to their credit, they have taken the long-term approach to sustain a healthy racing industry.

It is also worthy of note that the two institutions within racing that would benefit from promoting new owners and consequently larger fields are the trainers and jockeys, and at least in this direction both have been conspicuous by their absence. Trainers individually have perhaps moved in this direction, but as an organization they need to recognize the problem and provide more support to the industry through a concerted effort and take a more active roll in conjunction with other organizations.

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COMINGS AND GOINGS AT THE CHRB...



WELCOME BACK LINDA –
After leaving the CHRB more than three years ago to fill various limited-term positions with the Board of Optometry and later the Division of Gambling Control, Linda Hayes has returned to CHRB headquarters in Sacramento to resume her previous duties in the Policy and Regulation Unit. This marks her 26th year of service with the State of California. She started out with the Franchise Tax Board, then spent four years with the CHRB. Her current assignments include the development of regulations relating to the paymaster of purses and the licensing of exercise riders.

The ARCI Winners Federation now has a hot line installed and is currently receiving calls. Dial: 800-982-7731.

Several staff changes within the CHRB have occurred in the last few months, including the arrival of Lore Zawkiewicz from the Air Resources Board. She replaces Grace Lontiong in the Accounting Office, who transferred to the Department of Justice in April.

Marlene Valencia also left the Board in April for a promotion to office services supervisor with the Department of Fish and Game. Her replacement is Anson Gip, who transferred from the CHRB office services unit. In turn, Jennifer Rhode filled Gip's position in the unit. She comes to the CHRB from a sports medicine office in private industry.

Kudos for the Accounting Office

For the second consecutive year, the CHRB accounting office has received special recognition from the State Controller's Office (SCO) for excellence in financial reporting.

In order to qualify for the award, state agencies must follow specific criteria outlined by the SCO when preparing financial reports. The CHRB met all of the program requirements.

In congratulating all CHRB staff involved in earning this award, special recognition was given to Georgia Folkes, the CHRB senior accounting officer, who was instrumental in this achievement.

CHRB Liaisons with Footprinters Association and Rosarito Beach Municipal Police

As a good-faith gesture, the Footprinters Association, represented by CHRB Chief Investigator Robert Nieto, recently presented 24 recalled bulletproof vests to the Rosarito Beach (Mexico) Municipal Police.

Nieto is a member of the International Footprint Association, Chapter 53, Imperial Beach, California. This organization is very involved with assisting non-profit organizations and developing liaison with all law enforcement agencies.

Fund raising and contributions are generated for the Mexican Red Cross (Cruz Roja), the DARE program (recently started in Rosarito Beach), a drug rehabilitation center in the outskirts of the town, and liaison with the local municipal police, who are very short of funds and safety equipment.

The Footprinters are currently raising funds to assist the municipal police in acquiring a SWAT vehicle to be used when major incidents occur.

The bulletproof vests were presented on July 10 to Ignacio Garcia, Director of Police, Playas de Rosarito Beach, Baja California, Mexico, through Harry "O" Ozarinski, president of the association.

The vests were recalled in 1998 and replaced with new vests for the CHRB Enforcement Division, as mandated by law, and they were to be destroyed. Michael Kilpack, supervising investigator for the CHRB, also attended the presentation as a representative of the Board. Both Nieto and Kilpack donated their personal time for this effort.



CHRB Recruitment Effort Pays Off For Enforcement Division

By Robert Nieto
Chief Investigator CHRB

During a seven-month period last year, the Enforcement Division of the CHRB lost three investigator positions in the field due to retirements and transfers – two from the Santa Anita office and one from Bay Meadows.

The open-recruitment process for their replacements began last summer with numerous interviews held in Northern and Southern California. The process consisted of the initial interview during which the candidates were tested for their knowledge in several areas of law, procedures, and hypothetical scenarios. The candidates were scored and placed on a master list by rank.

A second interview for the top qualifiers took place in order to narrow the field. The top four finalists then were interviewed by CHRB Executive Director Roy Wood, Chief Investigator Robert Nieto, and the supervising investigators involved.

This process eventually led to the selection of two highly qualified candidates for the vacant slots in the Santa Anita office. Ismael Daniel Cabrera was hired in April and Michael L. Brown came aboard in May.

Cabrera comes to the Board with 34 years of law-enforcement experience, much of that in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he was raised. He earned a bachelor's degree in justice administration from Golden Gate College. He served with the San Francisco Airport Police from 1967 through 1970, then spent four years with the South San Francisco Police Department.

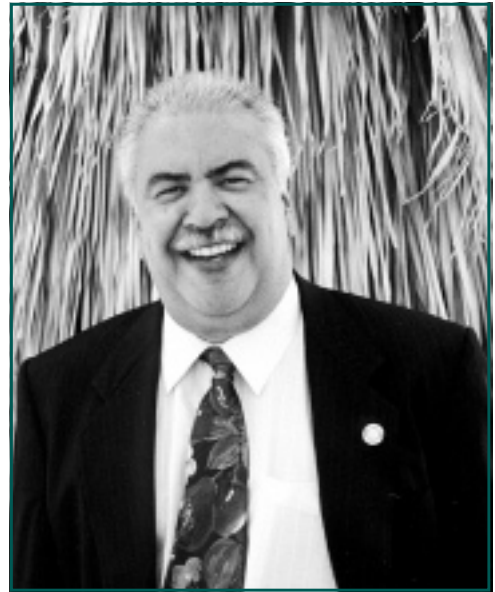
For the last 25 years, Cabrera worked as an agent for the U.S. Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. He rose through the ranks to the position of administrative division operations officer, which gave him supervision over all division training, personnel issues, administrative programs, and databases.

Cabrera and his wife of 32 years, Connie, reside in Anaheim.

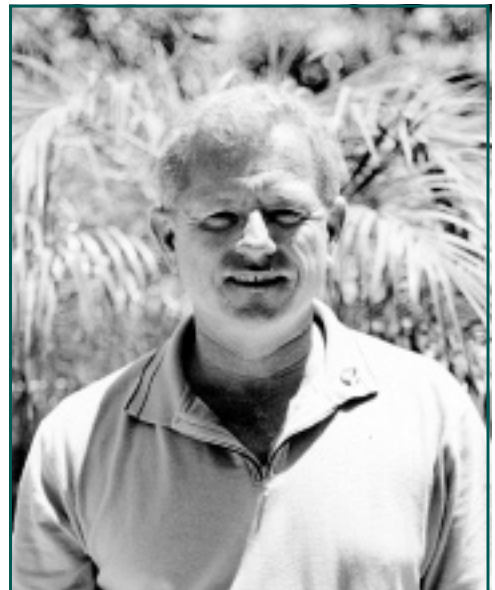
Brown comes to the CHRB after serving 29 years with the Los Angeles Police Department. Raised in Southern California, he earned an associate of arts degree at West Los Angeles Jr. College, and he also attended Cal State-Northridge.

Brown worked many details and geographical areas throughout the City of Los Angeles while serving with the LAPD. Prior to his retirement in May as a Detective III in charge of the Narcotics Field Enforcement Unit in the Devonshire Division, he supervised eight field investigators while coordinating narcotic investigations and working with an area task force.

Brown and his wife, Roxanne, reside in Valencia.



Ismael Daniel Cabrera



Michael L. Brown

Roy Wood and others gathered at the CHRB executive offices for a strategy session last month.

Among the racing executives at the meeting were Norm Towne, executive director of the California Association of Thoroughbred Racetracks, and Richard Cain, executive director of the California Authority of Racing Fairs (CARF).

CHRB IS Y2K COMPLIANT

Wood and CHRB Chief Information Officer Mory Atashkar were able to reassure everyone attending the meeting that the CHRB's licensing system and other internal computer operations have been Y2K compliant for some time. In fact, the CHRB was among the first California State agencies to be fully compliant.

Having put its own house in order at an early stage, the CHRB began pressing the racing industry to move forward as rapidly as possible with its own Y2K corrective program. The meeting in Sacramento was just the latest in a series of updates that the industry has been providing to the regulatory agency.

'DUMB' MACHINES NOT CONFUSED

DeGeorge, who flew in from Autotote headquarters in Delaware, explained that the pari-mutuel machines that dispense tickets will not confuse the two-digit code "00" for the year 2000 with the year 1900, which is the crux of the Y2K problem.

"Our (pari-mutuel) terminals cannot be confused by what is on the ticket.."

John DeGeorge

"Our terminals cannot be confused by what is on the ticket and they are not 'clock sensitive'," said DeGeorge. "All information about the wager, including the date, is managed by the back-end totalizator system. The point-of-sale terminals merely accept the date advertised by the totalizator system."

SYSTEM FIXED FOR NEXT 8 DECADES

The Autotote testing of its totalizator and simulcast systems last year did identify seven software modules within its totalizator system that required corrective programming.

"We fixed the tote code for the next 83 years, until the year 2083, which is essentially forever because by then we will have replaced the entire system," DeGeorge explained.

INSURERS SIGN OFF

Autotote's corrective measures have been checked and double-checked by its in-house quality assurance team, as well as independent reviews by technical experts from Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, the Canadian Pari-Mutual Agency, and Gaming Laboratories International. Even the insurance underwriters, who would suffer financially if the system crashed on January 1, have acknowledged Autotote's preparedness, and by agreeing to insure the system, those underwriters essentially gave Autotote the official seal of approval.

"We started addressing this problem way back in 1995,"

Mory Atashkar

Mark Thurman, the CARF official who oversees the California Horse Racing Information Management System (CHRIMS), noted that some things fall outside the control of Autotote and the racing industry, such as the telephone companies and power stations that service remote wagering locations in the simulcast network.

If one of those small collateral systems fails, it could disrupt the merging of pari-mutuel pools from that location. Accordingly, Wood instructed the CHRB staff to work with the industry to develop contingency plans and procedures for the "manual merge" of pari-mutuel data if problems occur.

DeGeorge and the other executives involved in preparing the wagering network for the year 2000 will continue to provide updates to the CHRB as their simulated date testing continues. John Reagan, the CHRB senior management auditor with the primary responsibility for overseeing totalizator operations, will confer regularly with Autotote representatives to make certain everything remains on schedule.

As for the CHRB's own licensing system and other internal computer operations, Atashkar and his senior staff programmer analyst Terry Martin have done all of the testing necessary to be absolutely certain that the CHRB systems will continue to function normally on January 1.

"We started addressing this problem way back in 1995," explained Atashkar, "because we issue three-year licenses, so we foresaw that the Year 2000 bug could begin to adversely affect our work as early as December of 1996, when we would start issuing licenses that would expire in 2000."

(Continued on page 9)

AT THE RACES...

CALIFORNIA EXPOSITION AND STATE FAIR

Earlene McCabe, a victim of breast cancer who is fondly remembered for her dedicated work with the California Horse Racing Board and her overall contributions to the horse racing industry and related endeavors, will again be honored posthumously by the California Exposition and State Fair with the Fourth running of the Earlene McCabe Derby on Sunday, August 29.

In conjunction with the Derby, a special champagne brunch and program will be held in the Cal-Expo Clubhouse beginning at 10 a.m. The program includes State Fair admission and reserved seats for the races, which begin at 12:45.

The event will benefit the Sutter Cancer Center, which is an innovative health care organization with a proud past and an important future in the fight against breast cancer.

DEL MAR

The Piedra Foundation's Dan Evans Memorial Equine Conference will be held during the Del Mar race meet at the Hilton Hotel (next to the racetrack) on Saturday, August 21, and Sunday, August 22.

Dr. Larry Bramlage, Dr. Norman Rantanen, and Dr. Cynthia Kollias-Baker will discuss various veterinary topics, including those related to common racing injuries and their treatment.

SANTA ANITA

Lonny Powell, who was named president and chief executive officer of the Los Angeles Turf Club after the Arcadia racetrack was purchased by Frank Stronach's Magna International Inc., now has announced his management team for Santa Anita.

Powell's senior management group includes Brant Latta, executive director, operations and administration; Frank De Marco Jr., executive director, general counsel, and secretary; and Tom Austin, executive director, facilities and development.

Other members of Powell's management team include Remi Bellocq, director of marketing; Peter Daily, director of food and beverage; George Haines II, director of mutuels; Michael Harlow, director of racing and racing secretary; Ron Hilts, executive assistant; Andrew Kure, director of simulcast development and operations; Neal Mullarky, director of operations and guest services; and Stuart Zanville, director of public relations.

Y2K

(Continued from page 8)

"This was no easy task. Our California Horse Racing Information System (CHRIS) is a collection of 1,700 on-line and batch programs, which contain over 270,000 lines of source code. It encompasses three databases, which contain a combined total count of just under 1.1 million records.

"We worked with the State of California's Teale Data Center to create a separate set of production database files, with each date and year field expanded to accommodate four-digit year values. This solved part of the problem, but there were many other projects as well, including the manual installation of year 2000 provisions into each program's source code."

Martin, an experienced programmer, came aboard in December of 1995 to help move things along. He designed and installed a feature that enabled the team to quickly perform a single-point adjustment to the system date.

The code modifications were completed in January of 1996. The technical staff then performed exhaustive testing and tuning of the revised system, followed by comprehensive testing by the entire user community. The users provided their unanimous approval of the system in February of 1996.

"I'm very encouraged by the way our technical staff handled this matter," said Wood. "Governor Davis has made Y2K a top priority of his administration, and I am proud to be able to say that the California Horse Racing Board is right on top of the Y2K problem."

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may be submitted to Mike Marten
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The shortage of horses added to the problem of late scratches – scratches after the program has been published – materially damaged both handle and fan interest at the recent Hollywood Park summer meeting. The inclination of trainers to go “fishing” for the optimum spot to run by waiting until after a race is drawn, handicapping it, and then scratching if they feel that they cannot win or at least have a good result has become an issue that should be evaluated.

LATE SCRATCHES HURT EVERYONE

Considering the value and cost of training horses, and to optimize earning potential, some would argue that “fishing” is legitimate in spite of the devious practice of requiring a veterinarian scratch in short fields to do so. But when program scratches reduce an already short field, it is particularly disheartening to racing fans and is counterproductive to quality racing. Short fields encourage racing secretaries to compensate by using cheaper races with cheaper horses, which generally are not concentrated within five or six barns, and thereby easier to fill. Such a trend is in itself ultimately deleterious to the industry.

If horsemen were to be permitted to “fish” for an easy spot, rather than use a vet scratch as an excuse not to run, a system of penalizing them for abusing the privilege would have to be established. Administratively, this would be a fairly simple exercise, but instituting such a draconian measure is hardly justified if “fishing” is not a common practice. According to an informal study conducted at Santa Anita last winter, the indications are that it is not, but a further detailed study might be justified.

The study at Santa Anita would suggest that by far the majority of late scratches were due to health problems with the horses. If this were the case, pressuring horsemen to run medically compromised animals would be counterproductive because it would significantly extend the time in which they would be able to return to competition. To avoid disastrous injuries and possible endless litigation, stewards are obligated to accept vet scratches. One must therefore assume that all vet scratches are legitimate, but on the basis of this assumption, it is also legitimate to prevent the animal from racing for up to ten days to insure that it is fully recovered.

It is also apparent that there are some administrative problems that cause unnecessary program scratches. These problems are primarily technical rather than philosophical, and can generally be resolved by either increasing the efficiency of staff or increasing the availability of personnel, such as official veterinarians and stewards, to consider scratches prior to the publication of the racing program. In previous years, when entries were taken only 24 hours prior to a race, late scratches were almost unheard of, but with entries being

“One must therefore assume that all vet scratches are legitimate, but on the basis of this assumption, it is also legitimate to prevent the animal from racing for up to ten days to insure that it is fully recovered.”

John Russell

taken as much as two and occasionally three days in advance, they are inevitable.

Finally, there is the question of program scratches due to changing track conditions such as a turf race being taken off due to rain or, more commonly, a track becoming muddy subsequent to entries being taken. Both of these situations are subject to so many variables that the discretion of stewards to permit scratches becomes an exercise largely dependent upon experience and their knowledge of horses to insure that rulings are objective and impartial. For instance, in the event of a track becoming muddy or sloppy, horses that have a deplorable record on similar tracks should have preference and be given special consideration if their connections should wish to scratch. Perhaps more subjectively, the trainer’s reputation could be weighed, and even the value of the horse involved should be considered.

When entries are taken for turf races, it is not unusual for an entry to specify “turf only” at that time, but there is nothing in the rules of racing that stipulates that a horse has the privilege of being excused from running due to a race being taken off the turf. To clarify this position, it would be more appropriate if the entry should instead bear the remark “turf preferred.”

Semantics aside, it is useful for a racing secretary to know at the time of entries being taken how many horses he might reasonably expect to stay in a race if it should be necessary to move it from the turf to the main track. Regardless, it can only be at the discretion of the stewards in these cases, subsequent to a conference with the trainer and perhaps on the advice of the State Veterinarian, to permit a scratch. At the risk of sounding militant, however, it is irrefutable that the absolute responsibility for any horse’s welfare rests with the trainer, and even the stewards must recognize that it is better to refuse their directive to run, and later adjudicate a broken rule, than to mend a broken leg.



After earning a B.A. in political science at UCSD, Gonzales found work in various non-profit programs, such as the Youth Task Force L.A. and the AmeriCorps project. This work brought him into contact with Villaraigosa, who invited Gonzales to join his field staff. Gonzales took temporary leave from Villaraigosa's office in order to do Latino outreach for the Gray Davis campaign. He later became part of Governor Davis' transition team.

"I jumped at the opportunity to get involved with the Y2K project," explained Gonzales. "I've always had an interest in technology issues, especially in what they can do for the average Californian. When you hear about a \$4 billion-plus budget surplus in California, that's due to our new economy – a technology-based, Internet-based economy. That makes Y2K more critical than ever."

Gonzales is passionate about many subjects, most notably government, technology, Y2K, the Latino community, and horse racing. He sees interrelationships between them all.

"Technology is taking off, and we all better put our seatbelts on," he predicted. "Technology can really help horse racing or really hurt it, depending on how we deal with it. This industry can be part of the new economy or it can get left behind."

"It starts with making yourself heard in Sacramento. The best time to be heard is during a period of transition, and that time is now. Legislators are typically those with the best interests of California in mind. Policymakers need to be told that a treasure is under their noses in the form of the horse racing industry. There are a lot of other people out there waving their arms to get the attention of legislators – people with important constituencies like veterans and various ethnic groups – and frankly, right now horse racing is not even on the radar screen for most legislators."

"This industry must do a better job of making itself heard in Sacramento. I come to Hollywood Park and I see a lot of important people like Jack Van Berg, and Neil Drysdale, and Bob Baffert, then I wonder, why don't those people come to Sacramento to communicate with their elected representatives? An intelligent person like Drysdale who can clearly state his views could be very effective."

"Fortunately, there are a few people trying to make their voices heard. One of them is Roy Wood, the CHRB executive director. We've made arrangements to spend some time in the Capitol together where I can introduce him to some of the people I know. A knowledgeable and articulate person like Mr. Wood can make a difference."

"Meanwhile, there's plenty that can be done at the racetrack and community levels. Attendance is declining? Well, the Latino community is an untapped market that can fill the stands."

"Technology is taking off, and we all better put our seatbelts on. Technology can really help horse racing or really hurt it, depending on how we deal with it. This industry can be part of the new economy or it can get left behind."

Oscar Gonzales

"Believe me, I want to help this industry. I want to help those people in the backside who are counting on that 1% of an allowance purse to buy school clothes for their children. Those people helped shape me."

So, what is in the future for Oscar Gonzales? Will he remain in public service? Or will the lure of the racetrack draw him back?

"As for the immediate future, it's hard to say, but before the dust settles in Oscar Gonzales' life, I will do my best to become a very successful trainer of thoroughbred horses," he responded. "As I said, it's in my blood."

"And another thing, one of my most important missions is to get my uncle Milo elected to the Horse Racing Hall of Fame. Perhaps the first thing I'll do is establish a Web page for him – maybe ismael.valenzeula.com – where people can find out more about him. Like I said, this industry can take advantage of technology or get left behind."



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